



Indiana State  
Department of Health  
Epidemiology Resource Center

## Quick Facts: Polio (Poliomyelitis)

### What is polio?

Polio is caused by a virus. Most people with polio do not have severe illness. In some cases, people may develop meningitis (an infection of the lining of the spinal cord and brain) or become paralyzed. Since 1979, the only polio cases in the United States have been in people from other countries or caused by the oral polio vaccine. The oral polio vaccine is no longer given in the United States. No cases of polio have been reported in Indiana since the late 1950s.

### What are the symptoms of polio?

Most people infected with polio do not develop symptoms or only have mild symptoms. Symptoms occur 3-21 days after exposure. Mild symptoms include fever, tiredness, headache, sore throat, nausea, and vomiting. In some cases, the illness becomes more severe, and symptoms include severe muscle pain and stiffness in the neck and back. Muscle paralysis may occur in a small number of cases. Death may occur if breathing muscles become paralyzed.

### How is polio spread?

Polio is spread through contact with the waste or throat droplets of an infected person. The virus must be swallowed to cause infection. This can happen when dirty hands or objects are put into the mouth.

### Who is at risk for polio?

People who have not received polio vaccine are at risk for polio. The greatest risk is to those who travel to or exposed to travelers from areas where polio cases still occur.

### How do I know if I have polio?

Polio is usually linked to travel to a country where it still occurs. If you have been exposed to someone diagnosed with polio and have the symptoms described, see your doctor. Other illnesses may cause symptoms that look like polio.

## How is polio treated?

Since polio is caused by a virus, antibiotics do not cure polio. There are no medicines to treat polio. Treatment focuses on easing the symptoms of the illness.

## How can polio be prevented?

The inactivated polio vaccine (IPV) is safe and very good at preventing polio infection. Most schools and some child-care centers require proof of vaccination before entry. If you have not had polio and have no record of getting the vaccine, see your doctor. Your doctor can decide if you need a dose of vaccine. Since there are places in the world that still have active polio disease, it is important for travelers to get the polio vaccine.

---

**For Travelers:** Polio is a problem in many other parts of the world. Though polio vaccination is a part of the routine vaccination schedule, it is a good idea to check the [CDC travel guidelines](#) for the country or countries you will be visiting and ensure you are up-to-date on your routine and travel vaccinations before travelling.

All information presented is intended for public use. More information on polio can be found at:

- <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/vpd-vac/polio/default.htm>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/hcp/acip-recs/vacc-specific/polio.html>
- <http://www.cdc.gov/polio/about/index.htm>